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A Study of the Negro Print Shops in Houston, Texas

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A STUDY OF THE NEGRO PRINT SHOPS
IN HOUSTON, TEXAS

By

Thomas Benjamin Bynum, Jr.

A Thesis in Mechanic Arts Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Bachelor of Science

in the

Division of Mechanic Arts

of the

Prairie View State Normal and Industrial College

Prairie View, Texas

May, 1939

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The writer wishes to acknowledge the co-operation of the Negro printers of Houston, and the many helpful suggestions and criticisms given by Mr. J. J. Abernethy, Mr. G. C. Bell, Mr. W. P. Terrell and Mr. G. H. Williams.

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INTRODUCTION

"The art of printing is the most important invention that was ever introduced to the world in its effects on the human mind, and of consequence on all civilized society; it preserves and disseminates all discoveries and improvements in the arts and sciences; it commemorates all other inventions; it hands down to posterity every important event; it immortalizes the actions of the great and good and above all, it extends and diffuses the word of God to all mankind."*

The foregoing statement, written in 1841, emphasizes the importance of the printing industry to human welfare. This art, which has been designated "the art preservative," has enabled man to keep a graphic record of his achievements, to preserve and perpetuate the knowledge he has acquired, to dispense this knowledge to rich and poor alike, and in this dynamic age in which we are living, to keep abreast of fast changing ideas and events.

Thus we see the importance of this study--a study of the Negro print shops which serve the Negro populace of one of the largest cities in the great Southwest. It is the intention of the author to analyze the Negro shops of Houston to determine just how well they are playing their part in the progress of the Negroes of that city.

The eleven shops represented in this survey are typical Negro businesses. They are scattered over the city of Houston and serve approximately 90,000 Negroes. They are divided into three groups--job shops, job and newspaper shops. They range from "holes in the wall" to modern up-to-date shops and newspaper shops. For the purpose of this study and in fairness to the proprietors, whose gracious cooperation made possible the

*
Savage--Dict. of Printing, 1841.

authenticity of the data to be analyzed the eleven shops will be referred to as Shop A, Shop B, Shop C, etc.

Each shop will be analyzed as to location, size, equipment, income, number of employees and types of work handled. The author's impression of each shop will follow this analysis. In the conclusion a criticism of the shops as a whole will be attempted and suggestions for improvement offered.

Shop A is located in the heart of the business district of the Third Ward on one of its principal streets. It occupies one room which is approximately 10'x12'. The lighting effects and ventilation in the small room were bad. Its equipment consists of two platen presses, one hand paper cutter, one hand punch, one hand stamper and a nice assortment of type. This equipment is valued at \$400. The owner has one assistant. When questioned about the monthly income of the shop the owner frankly stated that it was only fair.

The above facts are a clear indication that Shop A is equipped for printing such small jobs as tickets, invitations, stationery, etc. A small shop, such as this, with only one employee and a minimum cost of operation can be run profitably, however, it is decidedly a small business and will remain so until the owner amasses capital to enlarge it.

SHOP B

Shop B is not located in a business district. It occupies one room 15x36 feet with just the front door for ventilation. The equipment in this shop is a linotype machine, engravers department, lead cutter and proof press. The value of the equipment is estimated at \$7,000.00. There are five employees. This shop is strictly a newspaper shop and the newspaper itself is one of the greatest periodicals in the Southwest. White and Black have the greatest of respect for this newspaper which has interesting facts about both races. One of the interesting facts about this newspaper is that

CHAPTER II.

The data obtained during the author's visits to the various shops will be presented in narrative form. For a comparative analysis see the part of this thesis which is entitled "General Summary of Findings."

SHOP A

Shop A is located in the heart of the business district of the Third Ward on one of its principal streets. It occupies one room which is approximately 10'x12'. The lighting effects and ventilation in the small room were bad. It's equipment consists of two platen presses, one hand paper cutter, one hand punch, one hand stitcher and a nice assortment of type. This equipment is valued at \$400. The owner has one assistant. When questioned about the monthly income of the shop the owner frankly stated that it was only fair.

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SHOP B

Shop B is not located in a business district. It occupies one room 15x36 feet with just the front door for ventilation. The equipment in this shop is a linotype machine, engravers department, lead cutter and proof press. The value of the equipment is estimated at \$7,000.00. There are five employees. This shop is strictly a newspaper shop and the newspaper itself is one of the greatest periodicals in the Southwest. White and Black have the greatest of respect for this newspaper which has interesting facts about both races. One of the interesting facts about this newspaper is that

the contents of the paper are mostly written by one family. The type and pages are formed in the shop but the press work is done by white printers.

SHOP C

Shop C is located in an extremely business district. The shop is 8x25 feet with poor lighting and ventilation facilities. The equipment consists of two platen presses, hand stapling machine, knife and three cases of type. Shop C's income is slow and there were no prospects of rushing business. The individual proprietor had one co-worker. He valued his shop at One Thousand Dollars.

Lack of type forces this shop to have its linotype work done in outside shops, for the construction of certain jobs thus, cutting his profits. This shop cannot print many things because the amount of type will not permit it.

SHOP D

Shop D is located on a busy street in a business district. The shop is 10x12 feet and the lighting and ventilation are bad. The equipment for this shop is a platen press, hand paper cutter, hand stapler and an assortment of type. He had no employees and valued his shop at Five Hundred Dollars.

The owner seemed to be quite a hustling individual and had much printing on hand in spite of the smallness of his shop and the scarcity of equipment.

It was interesting to note that the lack of equipment did not stop this printer from advance work for he made what he wanted out of wood and gum to meet his necessity of certain jobs.

SHOP E

Shop E is located in a business district. The room is 15x25 feet

with poor lighting and ventilation. The equipment in this shop consists of a platen press and a good assortment of type. The owner values the shop at Five Hundred Dollars and has three employees. He too, has his linotyping done in other shops. Business is quite dull during the best of times.

This shop is the owner's secondary work and is just run to help him in his business. The outside work goes to help pay his employees. The shop showed little signs of developing.

SHOP F

In the back yard of his house in a non-business section is located Shop F. The shop is 12x30 feet with poor lighting and ventilation. The owner values his shop at One Thousand Two Hundred Dollars. The machinery consists of two platen presses, hand paper cutter, stitcher and an assortment of type. There is one employee and business is fair.

The owner of this shop has a steady monthly income and runs this shop as a side issue. He has plenty of personality and people will patronize him on this account. I think that he has a bad knowledge of printing.

SHOP G

In a 16x24 compartment of a garage in a non-business district is situated Shop G. The equipment in this shop is a platen press, hand stitcher, hand paper cutter, and assorted type and lead cutter. The shop is valued at \$3,500.00. There is only one employee and that is the owner. The owner said that business was "fair."

This shop was unsanitary in appearance and the machinery was damaged somewhat from dirt and dust. The work produced in this shop was not quality printing, and the type of shop from which it came was clearly seen in the printing produced.

SHOP H

Without a doubt Shop H was the best job shop among the Negro shops. It is located in a business district in an outstanding building. The shop is 20x50 feet but had poor ventilation. The equipment consists of two platen presses, one with a "Miller Feeder," hand paper cutter, stitcher, lead cutter, cut mounting machine and planer, and an assortment of type. The place was valued at Three Thousand Dollars. There were two employees.

The owner is about the best Negro printer in Houston and produces high class and efficient printing. Business is good every day and a large amount of jobs were on hand ready to be printed.

The owner has business qualities and uses such for the betterment of his shop as well as for himself

SHOP I

About the cleanest and most unique shop visited was Shop I, which is in a business district. The room is 15x40 and is well ventilated, and lighted. The equipment is a platen press, hand paper cutter and assorted type. The shop is valued at Fifteen Hundred Dollars and has one employee.

The owner was friendly and proud of his accomplishment thus far. He had good business and produced the same. His method of checking in and out jobs showed a good knowledge of business. He was ambitious and interested in the future development of his shop.

SHOP J

Shop J is located in a very favorable section of the down-town district of Houston. It occupies a plant which is about 30 x 30 feet and is very poorly lighted and ventilated. It is fairly equipped, having a

linotype, an antiquated Babcock-Alliance News Press, a job press, lead cutter and a hand paper cutter. This equipment is valued at Three Thousand Dollars. The owner does all of his work, having no other regular employees. His income, which is fair, varies a great deal. The plant is not covered by insurance.

This shop is located in a basement and the poor ventilation, poor lighting system and general untidiness were the things which impressed the author most when he made his visit. Although Shop J affords its owner a means of making a living there is much room for improvement. Proper management, involving the employment of an assistant, effective advertising and improvement of conditions in the shop would no doubt put Shop J into a higher income bracket.

SHOP K

Shop K is a newspaper and job shop which is a credit to Negro achievement. Besides publishing eighteen different newspapers a week, this shop also handles considerable job work. The shop is located in a non-business district. The production room is 44 x 60 feet, while the offices are housed in an addition which is 34 x 40 feet. The equipment includes an automatic Kluge Press, a platen press, an electric saw, three linotype machines and electrically operated paper cutter, a Ludlow Machine, Duplex Press, equipment for stereotype work, equipment for engraving work, a proof press, hand stitcher and perforator. The engraving department contains an etcher, router, process camero, whirler, enlarger and speed graphic camera. The linotypes and Ludlow machines are equipped with monomelt.

This up-to-date business employs thirty-five persons, men and women. Added to this, six hundred newsboys sell its papers all over Texas. The plant, valued at \$30,500 turns out more than \$100,000 worth of

business annually. The efficiency with which this shop operates is a compliment to the owner and a striking example of what Negroes can do when they know their business.

In order that we might compare the shops included in this survey, the author has compiled a series of tables based upon the points he had in mind while visiting the shops. These points include: Location, size, working conditions, equipment, personnel and income.

TABLE I

DISTRIBUTION OF ELEVEN NEGRO PRINT SHOPS
IN HOUSTON, TEXAS, BY LOCATION

Location	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	Total
Business District	X		X	X	X			X	X	X	X	8
Non-Business Dist.		X				X	X					4

Table I shows that most of the Negro print shops are located in various business districts in Houston. Only three of the eleven were out of the high rent districts. All of the shops rent their plants with the exception of one, which was one of the progressive newspaper shops.

One of the chief complaints coming from Negro business men is that most of their profit goes to the land owner.

GENERAL SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In order that we might compare the shops included in this survey, the author has compiled a series of tables based upon the points he had in mind while visiting the shops. These points include: Location, size, working conditions, equipment, personnel and income.

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Non-Business Dist.			X				X	X						

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One of the chief complaints coming from Negro business men is that most of their profit goes to the land owner.

TABLE II

DISTRIBUTION OF ELEVEN NEGRO PRINT SHOPS
IN HOUSTON, TEXAS, BY AREA IN SQUARE FEET

Area in Square Feet	:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	Total
100-299		X		X	X								3
300-499						X	X	X					3
500-799			X							X			2
800-Over									X		X	X	3

A careful study of Table II will show that there are three shops below an average of three hundred square feet. There are three shops between three hundred and four hundred and ninety-nine square feet; two shops between five hundred and seven hundred and ninety-nine square feet and three shops eight hundred or over in square feet.

The shops lower than three hundred square feet are found to be the most untidy and unsanitary. These shops complain of dull business. Rushing business could not be successfully accomplished due to the scarcity of space. The shops with a great amount of square feet have better working conditions.

TABLE III

DISTRIBUTION OF ELEVEN NEGRO PRINT SHOPS
OF HOUSTON, TEXAS, BY WORKING CONDITIONS
(Lighting, Ventilation, Cleanliness)

Working Conditions	:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	Total
Good										X	X		2
Fair									X				1
Poor		X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X		8

Table III plainly shows that out of the eleven Negro shops, eight have bad working conditions, which include lighting, ventilation and cleanliness, one with fair working conditions and two with good working conditions.

With eight out of eleven shops with poor working conditions, this would automatically slow up their production, cause waste and spoilage, effect mental attitude and bad health. With all of this, business would be dull and unprofitable.

The few with favorable working conditions show production, accuracy and less waste and spoilage, and thus doing a better grade of printing.

TABLE IV

DISTRIBUTION OF ELEVEN NEGRO PRINT SHOPS
OF HOUSTON, TEXAS, BY VALUATION OF SHOPS

Value	:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	Total
\$ 400 - 999		X			X	X							3
999-1,499				X			X						2
1,500-1,999										X			1
2,000-2,499													0
2,500-2,999													0
3,000-Over		X						X	X		X	X	5

TABLE IV

The main handicap to the Negro in business is his capital.

Table IV shows the valuation of the various shops. Three are less than \$1,000, two less than \$1,500, one less than \$2,000 and five over \$3,000. Out of the eleven shops only two are not suffering for lack of necessary equipment to accomplish their aim.

Without a doubt, the two are the most profitable. The others seem to think that you can do an "A" job with worn out equipment, which is impossible. It is not the amount of equipment you have but the amount of necessary equipment. It is better to spend a little money getting what you need than to spend more money buying such.

TABLE V

DISTRIBUTION OF ELEVEN NEGRO PRINT SHOPS
OF HOUSTON, TEXAS, BY NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES

Employees	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	Total
Individual				X			X					2
1 - 4	X	X			X	X		X	X	X		7
5 - 9			X									1
10 and over											X	1

Table V shows that most of the businesses are small, seven from one to four employees, one from five to nine, and one from ten and over--two were individual.

It was noticed that the shops hired help as to their business developments. One shop with a gigantic business employed thirty-five.

TABLE VI

DISTRIBUTION OF ELEVEN NEGRO PRINT SHOPS
OF HOUSTON, TEXAS, BY PRODUCTION AND INCOME

Production and Income	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	Total
Good		X						X	X		X	4
Fair	X		X	X		X	X			X		6
Poor					X							1

TABLE VI

As Table VI will show, it is gratifying to know that the average income of most of these shops is fair, and that only one shop out of eleven has a poor income.

2. These shops, whether rented or owned, usually lack sufficient space for a well planned arrangement of equipment.

3. Improper lighting effects and poor system of ventilation often injure the health of individuals working in these shops. No worker can perform to his best ability while suffering from ill health.

4. Only a small portion of the profits can be used for expanding the business. Most of the money made is spent for repairs and to enable the owner to maintain a respectable standard of living.

5. Negro shops are rarely equipped with the necessary equipment to compete with white printers.

Poor management is evidenced by the following facts:

1. Workers in Negro print shops jump about from place to place. Even in the shop which the author has has praised

CONCLUSION

After intensive study of the data obtained in this survey, and after weighing it carefully in the light of principles governing the operation of successful print shops, the author is convinced that Negro print shops lack two important things--capital and proper manggement.

Because of the lack of capital the following statements are true:

1. Negro print shops are often forced to rent space for their offices. This prevents their deriving the maximum return from their business.
2. These shops, whether rented or owned, usually lack sufficient space for a well planned arrangement of equipment.
3. Improper lighting effects and poor system of ventilation often injure the health of individuals working in these shops. No worker can perform to his best ability while suffering from ill health.
4. Only a small portion of the profits can be used for expanding the business. Most of the money made is spent for repairs and to enable the owner to maintain a respectable standard of living.
5. Negro shops are rarely equipped with the necessary equipment to compete with white printers.

Poor management is evidenced by the following facts:

1. Workers in Negro print shops jump about from place to place. Even in the shop which the author has has praised

1. so highly, few of the workers who were working there last year are there today. Competent work deserves good pay, but few owners of Negro print shops realize this.
2. Negro print shops are too busy trying to earn enough money to meet their pay rolls, to grasp the new ideas that are being advanced by experts.
3. In most of the shops no attention is given to shop arrangement. Much time could be saved and much waste could be eliminated if the best possible arrangement were effected.
4. There is an improper distribution of labor resulting in a failure to obtain maximum efficiency in production. Each man should be trained for his particular job.
5. There is a general air of carelessness surrounding Negro print shops. Too many pieces of work are turned out which have been poorly read for corrections, which shows a decided inferiority of quality workmanship exists.

In conclusion the author offers the following suggestions for the improvement of the Negro print shops in Houston and elsewhere, also to any young person planning to enter the field of printing:

1. Own your building.
2. Utilize the space available in your shop as economically as possible.
3. See that the worker's health is protected by proper lighting effects, proper ventilation, rest rooms, etc.

4. Invest some of the profits in the business and do not be content to remain stagnant while progress is being made all around you.
5. Study up on management problems and eliminate as many as possible from your shop.
6. Subscribe to and read periodicals which give suggestions for running your business. Incorporate as many of these ideas as are practicable into the management of your firm.
7. Entrust your proof reading to the most capable person in your employ.
8. Take an interest in your workers and their problems. Their contentment and well-being means more ~~and~~ work for your concern.

SAMPLES OF NEGRO PRINTING

ANNUAL ADDRESS
OF
Moderator D. Williams
TO THE
25th Annual Session
OF THE
YOUNG MINISTERS' DISTRICT
ASSOCIATION
OF TEXAS
ASSEMBLED AT THE
Encampment Grounds
Acreage Home
AUGUST 23 - 28, 1938
HOUSTON, TEXAS

SAMPLES OF NEGRO PRINTING

The Neopolitan Night Social Club
 would be pleased to have you as
 their guest at their
 Seventh Annual Formal Dance
 Monday evening, February 27, 1939
 at ten o'clock
 Down Town Grill
 Music by Russell Jacquet and his
 California Play Boys
 Strictly Formal

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SAMPLES OF NEGRO PRINTING

Houston Branch
 National Alliance of
 Postal Employees
 and the
 Ladies' Auxiliary
 Invite you to attend their
 Annual Dance
 at the
 Harlem Grill
 Tuesday, February 21st, 1939
 Hours: 10:30 until 2:30 p. m.
 Informal

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